



The Commission on
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

CWCSEO

Connecticut General Assembly

**Testimony of The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and
Opportunity
Presented to the Appropriations Committee
Thursday, February 24, 2022 ~ 2:00 PM via Zoom**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Ranking Members, and other esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, we are submitting joint testimony written by Thomas Nuccio, Children's Policy Analyst of the CGA's Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO) and Dr. Pina Violano, the Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee's Advisory Fellow and Primary Administrator. We are pleased to submit testimony **in support** of the following bill:

- H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

Public Act 21-35 designated the Commission as administrative staff of the Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee produced a final report, submitted on December 30, 2021, which detailed the issue of gun violence in Connecticut and highlighted many policy recommendations on how to reduce the level of gun violence and community violence in our state.

From 2015 to 2019, over 559 people in Connecticut were victims of homicide. The vast majority of victims were from gun violence and many more survived life-altering gunshot wounds. Connecticut, like other states, has experienced a vast increase in violence in 2020, where the state has seen over 157 homicides and 96-gun homicides as of October 2021.¹ This violence is disproportionately concentrated in just a few cities, with Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven being hit the hardest. African Americans make up just over 12% of Connecticut's population but constitute over 65% of the state's gun homicide victims. The injuries and loss of life have generated an estimated \$430 million in measurable costs annually. Additionally, bringing the societal costs to over \$1.2 billion each year.² Evidenced-based, evidenced-informed, and Community-centric intervention and prevention programs have proven to be successful.

¹ CT Violent Death Reporting System, CT Department of Public Health as of 2/21/2022

² Source: Giffords Law Center, US Bureau of Economic Analysis, CDC WISQARS, World Bank.

https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/b2ee3158-aff4-4563-8c3b-0183ba4a8135/economic-costs-of-gun-violence.pdf.

The Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee's final report recommends that the General Assembly establish a **Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention to coordinate the funding and implementation of evidence-based, evidence-informed, community-centric programs and strategies to reduce street-level gun violence in the state.** These community-based intervention programs have a highly successful track record across the country and have been validated through academic research. Even in cities that suffer from high rates of gun violence, less than 1% of the population is responsible for most of the shootings.

Effective community-based programs narrowly focus on the small percentage of those at highest risk to shoot or be shot and prevent shootings from happening. The most effective way to curb community violence is to coordinate a community-based strategy through city-wide and state-wide infrastructure. The overarching component of intervention programs is frontline violence prevention which includes professionals whose job is to develop close relationships with individuals who are at high risk. The Advisory Committee sees the importance of these "credible messengers" and calls upon the Appropriations Committee's assistance in bridging silos between the frontline workers and government agencies **by fully funding an office of gun violence prevention.**

Investing in community-based, community centered solutions focused on reducing gun violence are in our state's best interest. Strategies that focus on reducing gun violence not only with violence intervention, but also prevention and aftercare, are paramount to healing our citizens who are most affected by gun violence. Many states across the country have already taken steps by investing in the executive branch infrastructure to fund, implement, support, and oversee community-based violence prevention programs. The establishment of a Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention could provide the necessary coordination, funding, and comprehensive strategic planning to reduce gun violence in Connecticut.

Identification of organizations, which have an impact on the success of reducing gun violence in the urban communities, is critical to the success of this work. Additionally, addressing the high incarceration and recidivism rates can have a positive impact on children, families, and the communities at large.

Community engagement is another critical element for this work to be effective. Involving those most impacted by gun violence and empowering them to actively participate with the Commission ensures that representatives from the community are at the table when decisions are being made. This Commission should also include community-based organizations and individuals involved in violence prevention work. Involving the community proactively in the development of crime prevention strategies is central to this work. Having mental health services readily available for survivors of homicide victims as well as mobile crisis units which are deployed when victims call 211, ensures that communities experiencing violence and trauma have sufficient advocates and resources.

We support the establishment of a **Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention** to coordinate the funding and implementation of evidence-based, evidenced-informed, community-centered programs and data driven strategies to reduce street-level gun violence. A coordinated and unified effort among community-based outreach organizations, victim service providers, public safety and law enforcement officials, healthcare providers, state agencies, and most importantly, our youth is central to our focus.

Gun violence is a public health crisis. Connecticut needs to invest in the organizational infrastructure to find, fund and evaluate the effectiveness of these programs. An Office or Commission focused solely on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention is needed now more than ever.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

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